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ABSTRACT

A study of the educational potential of senior citizens was conducted at the Eastern Campus of Cuyahoga Community College (CCC), in Ohio. Focusing specifically on whether seniors would benefit from a higher level of involvement and integration into the mainstream of community college programs and activities, the investigation reviewed demographic data, the cognitive functioning of older adults, and the shortcomings of curricula designed exclusively for seniors. In addition, interviews were conducted with 92 older students who were either enrolled for credit or in CCC's "60+ Program," which allows students to audit courses free of charge. Study findings included the following: (1) while seniors comprised 2.2% of all CCC students, they constituted 5.1% of the student body on the Eastern Campus; (2) of those students between 60 to 63 years old who were surveyed, 70% were female, and 50% had attained college and advanced degrees, while most others had taken college courses previously; (3) the majority of respondents took courses in the arts and sciences; (4) most perceived learning as an end in itself; (5) both audit and credit students reported taking all tests and doing all homework; (6) respondents reported that they had not experienced age discrimination from either faculty or students; and (7) the population surveyed resembled younger part-time students, with the exception that the older students did not have specific educational goals. Marketing recommendations and the survey instrument are included. (MAB)

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Accessing the Senior Citizen Student

A Paper for

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THESIS

The thesis of the presentation is that senior citizens can benefit from a higher level of involvement and integration into the mainstream of the activities of a community college and at the same time are a valuable resource.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Nationally we are an aging population. All the euphemisms in the thesaurus will not help us in covering over this profound change as it affects all of our societal arrangements. Not far into the next century, up to fifty percent of the population may be over the age of fifty. Currently, thirty one million people in the U.S. are 65 plus (12.5%). By 2030, twenty-one percent of the population will be over 65 and that may be 58-68 million. In the 45-64 age cohort there are 46.5 million or 18.7% of the nation's population. Those reaching 50 in 2002 would have been born in 1952 and those reaching 65 would first seen the light of day in 1937.

Currently, people who are now 60-65 were born between 1927-1932. They were of elementary school age during the depression. They were teens during World War II. During the 50's they were in their late 20's and 30's. During the 60's, they were parents of teens. During the 70's, they were working to maximize their economic well being. In the last decade, they began looking forward to retiring.

For many of them, education attainment is low. Only one half have completed high school or better. The depression and the war kept many from finishing high school or starting college. While some used the G. I. Bill, women were generally left out. Many of the men who started college never finished; they had to earn a living and some are dead already. The next group, those in the 45-65 group are better educated. Of those 50-54, for instance, 57.8% have completed high school or better and 19.8% have finished college. Birth rates stand at 17/1,000 and even the eight year cohort of the "traditional" college student and some of the not so traditional ones (18-25 years old) would account for only 28-30 million potential students in the year 2010, assuming economic growth, no war or some other catastrophe, as compared with the 40 million people 60+. Life expectancy for those born in 1950 (those who will be 60 in 2010) is 68 for males; 72 for females. For those born in 1980, it is 70 for men and 78 for women.

Our aging population presents a new challenge to the community college, and this paper seeks to examine responses.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

What has happened that is more significant than simply the extention of life is that many more people survive past their 40's and 50's, which means that more people will live longer, not just that individuals live longer. This is obviously not simply a genetic or bio-medical technology issue; it is also an educational issue.

There is not an institution or organization that will escape being affected. From clout in the political arena, through changing buying habits and the aged's increased impact on health care systems to families, all of us are being impacted in terms of resource availability and allocation.

This paper is designed to:

1. Review current institutional arrangements for the aging population who currently are enrolled either for credit or as part of a 60+ program, where they take the courses on an audit basis,

2. Discuss the educational potential of the aging students,

3. Review the experiences of a cohort of aging students at one campus of a multi-campus urban community college, and

4. Discuss and recommend marketing strategies to the aging student.

EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

We want older people to come to our campuses to use our services, support us in levy and bond elections, and to support local, regional, and statewide decisions relative to the vitality of the community college.

While the argument has been made, and to a certain extent is the case, that some seniors have particular educational needs that can best be met in age segregated environments, there is a growing segment of the population, already educated, that can benefit from integration into the regular classroom, as demonstrated by the research in this paper. The question of mainstreaming has been answered differently by different colleges and universities. The community college as the people's college would by its mandate have a particular responsibility to aggressively respond to the both segments mentioned here.

We have generally done so by allowing the 60+ program student to enroll on a space available/audit basis, but we

have not aggressively sought them out. We also have special programs for seniors, but we have not analyzed who chooses which. We have also not gone after the pre-"60+" student with an eye to his/her continued enrollment later on, which type of program is best for whom, and how to "capture" them as a significant market segment.

We have not looked at the older student in the same manner as we have our other students, because of specific prejudices and stereotypes, many of which revolve around their alleged inability to perform well in the regular classroom. We turn therefore to a description of this important aspect.

COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING OF THE OLDER ADULT

Although, there is a decline in some areas of cognitive functioning for people over 60, it is important to note that these declines may not be of great magnitude. Specific areas which show relatively large declines are spatial ability, inductive reasoning, and verbal meaning. Of these, verbal meaning has the greatest implication for academic achievement. However it has also been demonstrated that if the information is not presented in a quick fashion, the verbal meaning skills of the older person approximate those of younger people.

There is considerable evidence that information and verbal skills remain at a high level in the aging adult.

Additionally, the older person characteristically thinks in a somewhat more rigid fashion relative to younger adults. This most likely stems from two sources: loss of neurons and an environment that does not provide the diversity social interaction that provides the basis for the formation of new concepts.

The loss of neurological functioning affects what John Horn refers to as fluid intelligence. This is the ability to approach new problems in a systematic and logical manner. Although, this can be remediated for the neurolgically intact person with the proper environment, one could not reasonably hope to reagain full functioning in that area if the decline is due to a severe loss in the number of neurons.

The environmental input to this rigidity of thinking offers more hope. B.F. Skinner has described some situations that could reinforce the older person to become more rigid. Many people live alone and do not have the availability of interaction to develop new concepts. Additionally, older people often lead extremely routine and predictable lives. For these people learning is often passive, building on previously learned material rather than presenting new

challenges and feedback for the learner. Older people are reinforced for their memories. While these are important and interesting material for younger people, these reminiscences do not help the older person think in new ways.

Based upon extensive longitudinal research, K. Warner Schale has identified six factors that seem most associated with a high level of cognitive functioning in the older adult. These are:

*Absence of cardiovascular or other chronic disease

*Favorable environment linked to a high socioeconomic status

*Involvement in an intellectually stimulating and complex environment

*Flexible personality style in middle age

*High cognitive functioning of a spouse

*Maintenance of level of perceptual processing speed.

Given the research and the obvious influence of environment, the community college is able to provide just what the doctor ordered for some older persons to maintain a high level of cognitive functioning. It provides the structure for academic interaction and the all-important feedback. Individual problems with verbal meaning and short-term memory defict could be managed, most probably, in the majority of people by taping lectures as well as taking notes. The seniors, who do not demonstrate significant neurological deficits, would most likely be able to monitor their own fatigue and/or stress levels and manage them by taking more or fewer hours and choosing courses of appropriate difficulty. College counselors may be helpful with the last point. Older people who are able to handle college courses would need no additional services or facilities.

Seniors who do have more significant impairment or are not motivated to take regular classes have the option of enrolling in the specifically designed programs for them. These programs deal with problems that the aging population specifically faces and general interest courses, but are not as rigourous as those in the regular college curricula.

CURRICULUM

While non-credit, special interest, workshops and seminars for the aged certainly have a place in the education of the older person, the for-credit traditional college

courses may benefit the older person at least as much if not more than the special courses for seniors.

We fear that all too often, courses designed for seniors are not intellectually challenging and are attended largely for the socializing benefit. An elderly gentleman was heard to remark in an art class populated largely by seniors and in which there was minimal instruction, that most everyone was there so they had someplace to go instead of waiting for the next meal. Hopefully, we can provide something more than a pleasant waiting place before the next meal.

While many have come to think of higher education as a means to an end, the research has shown that people who have liberal arts degrees report a higher level of happiness and satisfaction with their lives than those people who majored in career oriented fields. Since few elderly students are on a career path, it seems likely that they would prefer the liberal arts courses which they may consider ends in themselves, or a means to a more fulfilling life. Sometimes it's just neat to be able to tell a Monet from a Manet and how to look at the world in a new and more colorful way.

RESEARCH

A Sampling of Students Between the Ages of 57 and 63

Cuyahoga Community College, Eastern Campus

Twenty-four percent of the student body of CCC is enrolled at Eastern Campus, while fifty-five percent of the students over age 60 is enrolled at Eastern Campus. Seniors comprise 2.2 percent of the total student body and 5.1 percent of the student body at Eastern Campus.

Demographic Data: Eastern Campus Only

Age: 57-63		
Full-time:	5	5.4%
Part-time:	48	52.0%
Audit:	9	9.8%
Transfer:	2	2.2%
Program 60:	28	30.0%
Total:	92	99.4%

One half of this sample is below 60 and one half above.

Age: 60-63		
Full-time:	3	6.4%
Part-time:	12	25.5%
Audit:	4	8.5%

Program 60:	28	59.5%
	47	99.9%

Males: 14 Females: 33

Of those students over 60, 32% are taking courses for grades.

Courses by division:

Age: 60-63

	Number	Division
Full-time:	1	Arts and Sciences
	1	Health Careers
	1	Business, Mathematics, and Technology
Part-time:	7	Arts and Sciences
	2	Health Careers
	2	Business, Mathematics, and Technology
	1	Physical Education
Audit:	1	Arts and Sciences
	2	Business, Mathematics, and Technology
	1	Physical Education
Program 60:	21	Arts and Sciences Studio Art: 10 Languages : 5
	8	Business, Mathematics, and Technology
	2	Physical Education

Sixty-four percent of these students are taking courses in the Arts and Sciences.

Age: 60-63

Hours Taken:

Full-time:	Range:	4-14 Hours
	Average:	10 Hours
Part-time:	Range:	3-12 Hours
	Average:	5 Hours
Audit:	Range:	3 Hours

Average: 3 Hours

Program 60: Range: 3-9 Hours
Average: 5 Hours

Interviews of Students Ages: 60-63

Please refer to the interview instrument (Appendix A).

Nineteen students were interviewed. Two are full-time, six part-time, one audit, and nine Program 60. Six are males and thirteen are females.

1. When did you originally enroll?

Twelve of these students originally enrolled between two and eight years ago. For four, this is their first quarter, and for three, this is their first year.

2. How did you hear about us?

Almost all the students reported that they had been aware of CCC for years through the media. Several stated that their children had gone to CCC. Two originally enrolled in the Elders Program, but found it boring and unchallenging, so decided to take regular college courses.

3. Why are you taking courses?

The answers included in order of numbers given:

a. "Further my education."
b. "I'm doing it for me."
c. "It's FUN."
d. "I wanted to learn something in a specific area." i.e. computers, genetics, art
e. Two students wanted to learn a foreign language to because they travel or to speak to in-laws.
f. Two wanted to get a degree without a goal of working afterward.
g. Two were taking courses to obtain credentials in early childhood education because they owned daycares.
h. One was in a job retraining program being paid for by his company after he was laid off from his job.
i. Physical fitness

4. Have you felt that you are an integral part of the class?

All nineteen gave a resounding YES to this question. All students felt that the teachers treated them in exactly the same as younger students were treated. They were

expected to participate in classroom discussions, received extra help when they asked for it, etc.

When they did not like a teacher, they stated reasons that other students give such as:

-Reads from the book
-Is disorganized
-Needs sensitivity training
-Gives us his life history

All nineteen had extremely positive things to say about the students. They enjoyed interacting with the younger students and found them helpful and friendly. Several mentioned that they students didn't notice that they were "old". Several mentioned how nice it was to really get to know the students well when they all took a series of courses together over the year. A few were surprised in a nonjudgemental way at how much younger students swear!

5. Did you do the papers and take the tests?

The answers were a surprise here. All students, including those auditing the courses, reported that they completed the work assigned and took the tests. The only exceptions were those students in studio art. Even those students reported doing the projects when they originally enrolled, and only after having taken the series, did they begin to use the facilities as a studio only.

The students generally seemed surprised by this question, and gave such responses as, "Of course. How else could I tell if I'm learning?" Others said it gave them a real sense of pride to do well on assigned work. Several from the Program 60 complained about having to enroll late and missing the first class or two. They felt a bit behind and nervous about taking the first test.

6. What did you contribute to the class?

Most students felt that they contributed no more or less than the younger students. When questioned about life experiences specifically, most said that occasionally they talked about their's, but that they considered everyone's life experiences important regardless of age.

One person stated that she felt seniors were more likely to challenge a teacher who wasn't teaching because the seniors had less to loose than the younger students.

Several thought that because they were there, they inspired the other students. "They get a kick out of seeing a little old man sitting there." One said that he encourages the students to stay in school while they are young.

7. Would you like to earn an Associate Degree?

Only four said yes. Only one of those wanted a degree to become more employable. Half said no because they already had college degrees! Several had post-graduate degrees.

8. If you qualified for financial aid, would you be willing to apply for it so that you could take the courses for credit?

Only those interested in obtaining degrees answered yes.

9. Do you volunteer?

Half said yes. Almost all these volunteered services for the elderly. Average time was six hours per week.

Five said that they used to but now don't have time due to school.

Five said no.

Interviewer Observations

The students interviewed were friendly, out-going, and cooperative. Most seemed comfortable with their age, and many used the word "old" in describing themselves.

Most had a sense of humor about their age, being out of school a long time, and their physical problems. Nobody mentioned problems with taking notes, hearing, short-term memory, or the physical facility.

Several students mentioned that they started out slowly by taking a few hours and worked up to a heavier schedule. The physical education student said that she paces herself a bit slower in class.

Those taking placement tests and remedial courses were not bashful about using those resources.

Almost all students were excited about their work and CCC and perceived learning as an end in itself with no occupational goal in mind. All expressed appreciation that CCC was available to them.

Almost all stated that they really enjoyed being around the younger people because being around old people all the time was boring. (That was one reason they are not interested in the Elders' Program.)

A notable exception was the man who was laid off from work as a quality control engineer. While he likes the teachers and the students, but hates going to school. He

stated that book learning was not for him and he would never would have returned to school if he weren't afraid of not being able to earn a living. He did state however, that he appreciates the opportunity of going to school, because otherwise he might end up on the street.

SUMMARY

-The typical student aged 60-63 appears to be self-assured, having a long-term commitment to education, and involvement in the community. While 70% of this sample was female, this may be partially due to the relatively young age sampled (60-63). Many of the men may still be employed full-time. About half of this population have college and advanced degrees while most of the others have had some college courses (often at CCC).

-The majority of the courses taken are in the Arts and Sciences Division with significant numbers in Business, Mathematics, and Technology and Health Careers. Students in the latter two areas tend to be students taking courses for credit. The majority of the courses taken tend to require both fluid and crystalized intelligence and are courses requiring a substantial amount of work to complete them.

-Students choose specific courses because of a particular area of interest.

-Hours taken range from 3-14 per quarter with the average being five.

-Students generally take courses because they think it is fun to continue to learn and they want the exposure to a wide variety of ages.

-Most perceive the learning as an end itself rather than taking courses to obtain another specific goal.

-All students, credit and audit, reported taking the course work very seriously doing all required assignments and taking tests.

-All students reported that they have experienced no age discrimination from either faculty or students. All students reported positive experiences interacting with both faculty and students.

-The majority of students felt that they do contribute to the class. However, they feel their contributions are not specific to their age. Most of them stated that their contributions are no more or less important than the contributions of younger students. Only occasionally do they feel that their age provides an added dimension to the class.

Many of them feel that they are taking courses where life experience is not relevant. Note that few were taking psychology, sociology, or history where life experience might be considered more relevant.

-The program 60 students expressed no desire to take courses for credit even if they did not have to pay. The learning is important, not the credit. Several persons taking courses for credit stated that when they turned 60 in a few months, they planned to take the courses in Program 60 so they would not have to pay.

-Nobody mentioned special problems regarding note taking, hearing, short-term memory, or the physical facility. Nobody mentioned that the college should provide any special treatment for them. A few had taken placement tests and remedial courses and seen counselors and reported them helpful.

-This population seems to know what it wants and how to titrate their work so that it is not overwhelming or understimulating.

-In conclusion, the population surveyed appears to resemble the bright, well-motivated, younger part-time college student with the exception that the older student does not have a specific goal in mind. These people embody to a large degree the characteristics that the older person needs to maintain a high level of cognitive functioning as stated by K. Warner Schale.

MARKETING

Target Groups:

1. Those people who are aged 60+ who are committed to education, involved in the community, and are self-motivated.

This is the group that is typical of those already enrolled. This group could probably be increased because many members have not considered starting or going back to college.

2. Those people aged 45-60 who are committed to education, involved in the community, and are self-motivated.

Given that the majority of those students aged 60+ first began taking courses between two and ten years, ago, this group will eventually bolster the student population that is 60+. An added benefit to the college is that students in this age group are paying and would contribute to FTE.

Benefits to Students:

Continuing one's education is:
-Fun,
-Provides an opportunity to learn new skills and express creativities that one may not be aware of,
-Promotes a feeling of competence, and
-Provides an opportunity to interact with a variety of people of different backgrounds and ages.

Benefits to the College:

Because of the personal characteristics of the target groups, they:
-Would act as excellent role models for the younger students,
-Would increase the level of instruction in the classroom because of their own high expectations, and
-Would increase FTE.

Because of the characteristics of the target groups, the college would not have to provide additional services or support. These people are capable of utilizing the present system.

Marketing to the Older Student:

Minimal marketing efforts may be quite effective. They should focus on:
-The community college is for all ages,
-The community college provides an opportunity to learn new information in academic areas, learn new skills (including sports), and discover creative possibilities in the studio arts and music,
-The community college provides an opportunity for interacting with people of different backgrounds and ages,
-If the student is over 60, he or she may register on an audit only basis when space is available for fee only and,
-The community college is inexpensive for those students, of any age, who opt to take courses for college credit. It is certainly comparable to most continuing adult education classes offered by the public school systems. AND the student earns college credit!

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to demonstrate in this paper that the community college can fulfill its mission in providing access to educational services to all segments of the the community. In the case of the older student, it has done so to a certain extent, but needs to reach out a bit further. We

have seen how the older student who comes from an environment that stresses education may and can participate in the mainstream of our operation, benefit from it, and enjoy it. As our population ages and comes to their older age with a better educational background, we need to access (in both senses) these community members.

We have tried to demonstrate that there is a market out there of mature students who would avail themselves of our resources and programs if they were just "keyed in" to that which we have and that which we do. With the trend in socio-demographics and educational attainment levels rising, we need to seriously look to the older age cohorts for our clientele if we wish to keep our enrollment numbers up. Serious cuts in ancillary services occur when enrollment drops, negatively impacting everyone, including the remaining students.

But we do not have to either "re-invent the wheel", or "bend ourselves out of shape", because what we have "ain't broke"; we need though to make sure that we are offering the best there is to offer for all of our potential students, and then let everyone know about it.

RESOURCES

The following represents just a segment of material available for consultation. Personal interviews, oral histories, and historical documentation from periods other than "now" should be examined.

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SURVEY FOR OLDER STUDENTS

Number:

D/O/B:

Sex:

Telephone:

Audit or Credit:

Total Hours:

Present Courses:

Hello, M_____. My name is Catherine Clavner, and I'm a Faculty member at Cuyahoga Community College. A colleague and I are presenting a paper on the role of education for the senior student. I would appreciate it if you could help me by answering a few brief questions about your experience. The interview will only take five minutes. Your name will remain confidential.

1. When did you originally enroll?

   Why?

2. How did you hear about us?

3. Do you take classes for credit or audit?

4. Approximately how many hours have you taken?

5. In what subject areas were your classes?

6. When did you choose them?

Now I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences in the classroom.

1. Generally, what did you get out of the classes?

2. Have you felt that you are an integral part of the class?

   Why?

   Why not?

3. (Audit only) Did you do the papers and take the tests?

   (If yes) Did these help you reach your objectives for the class?

   In what way?

4. What did you contribute? (Ask about both students and instructors if both are not mentioned?)

   If "nothing", why not?

5. What are your goals in taking classes?

   Now I would like to ask a few questions about tuition and fees?

1. (Audit only) If you did not have to pay for the courses would you like to do the work and earn the credits?

2. If you qualified for financial aid, would you be willing to apply for it so that you could take the courses for credit?

3. Would you like to earn an Associate's Degree?

   We're almost done. Two more questions.

1. Are you currently employed?

   (Yes) How many hours per week?

2. Do you volunteer?

   (Yes) How many hours per week?

That's it. You have been very helpful. Thank you very much for your time.